DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 167 475 SO 011 555

TITLE	Film as Revolutionary Weapon: A Pedagogical Analysis. Latin American Studies Program, Film Series No. 3.
INSTITUTION	California Univ., Riverside. Latin American Studies Program.
PUB DATE	Aug 77
NOTE	19p.; For a related document, see SO 011 554
AVAILABLE FROM	Latin American Studies Program, University of California, Riverside, California 92521 ($2.00, paperbound)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Audiovisual Communication; Course Evaluation; Critical Thinking; Culture Conflict; Depressed Areas (Geographic); Developing Nations; Documentaries; Economic Disadvantagement; Film Criticism; *Film Study; Higher Education; *History Instruction; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Interpretive Skills; *Latin American Culture; Popular Culture; *Revolution; Rural Areas; Social Change; Student Reaction; *Thematic Approach; Urban Slums; Visual Learning

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a university course designed to examine the use of film as a revolutionary medium in Latin American countries. Objectives of the course were to illustrate the complexity of studying a film genre, develop an analytical framework for comparing revolutionary films, and encourage students to reach their own conclusions about the nature and effectiveness of revolutionary film. Initial class sessions focused on the basic tools of film analysis, on the social, economic, and militaristic characteristics of Latin American countries, and on revolutionary film in general. After these introductory sessions, students screened one film a week, wrote film analyses, and attended discussions. Short lectures preceded the screenings and outside readings were assigned. The final examination required students to develop an individual definition of revolutionary film, evaluate the six films seen in the course on the basis of their definition, and evaluate the use of film as a source for teaching. Student reaction to the course was positive; most felt that film facilitated the teaching of history and placed more responsibility on the students in their role as critics. The six documentary and feature films shown in the course were "Hour of the Furnaces" (Argentina, 1968), "Mexico: The Frozen Revolution" (Mexico, 1970), "Memories of Underdevelopment" (Cuba, 1968), "The Principal Enemy" (Peru, 1974), "The Promised Land" (Chile, 1973), and "The Guns" (Brazil, 1963). (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED167475

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Carlos E. Cortés
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

FILM AS REVOLUTIONARY WEAPON: A PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS

By
Leon G. Campbell
Carlos E. Cortés

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM
FILM SERIES NO. 3
AUGUST, 1977

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

SP-011555

This publication is a product of the course, "Film as Revolutionary Weapon," which was given during the Spring quarter, 1977, by Professors Leon G. Campbell and Carlos E. Cortes of the Department of History, University of California, Riverside. This publication is partially supported by a University of California Faculty Minigrant for Undergraduate Instructional Improvement. It contains an introductory essay on the development of our film-and-history pedagogy and the organization and results of this film course, as well as two selected student essays written during the course. It is our hope that this booklet will prove useful for teachers who present courses on film and history, for those who use films in their general history courses, and for those who plan to use films in courses on Latin America.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Teaching about Film as Revolutionary Weapon 5
Selected Film Analyses
"Hour of the Furnaces"
Karrla Burg 13
"The Promised Land"
Katherine Cech 16

TEACHING ABOUT FILM AS REVOLUTIONARY WEAPON

by Leon G. Campbell and Carlos E. Cortés

Recent years have seen a hue and cry about the decline of language literacy — the ability of students and, ultimately, adults to read and write effective English. As educators we must respond to this critical problem with energy, dedication, and imagination. Yet we must also be concerned lest we define "literacy" too narrowly. While striving to increase student "language literacy," we should also commit ourselves to developing student "media literacy" — the ability to "read," comprehend, and analyze the visual media.

Americans today derive increasing amounts of their "knowledge" from the visual media. One recent survey indicated that sixty-five per cent of college graduates considered television, not newspapers or magazines, as their major source of news. A survey of fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade students reported that television had the greatest impact on their attitudes toward foreign nations and peoples.[1] Yet hours of passive exposure to the movie screen or television set do not automatically produce media literacy. For that matter, merely showing films in a classroom does little to increase media literacy.

Motion pictures themselves are not strangers to the history classroom. History teachers have long used them as supplementary or enrichment materials. However, particularly in the past decade, a growing number of professors have begun to offer courses in which films, rather than serving as supplements, become the principal documents for student analysis. Such professors are aware that films provide a "you are there" type of living history with an eloquence, immediacy, and drama rarely equaled by lectures and textbooks. Yet, much as in courses emphasizing written materials and lectures, film-based courses need a solid, well-conceived pedagogy in order to provide students with a valid, valuable, and stimulating learning experience. Interested in developing student media literacy and convinced that motion pictures have immense potential for effective student learning, we decided to offer a series of film-and-history courses.

As Latin American historians, we chose to focus on this geographical area in our first such course. Therefore, during the spring quarter of 1975 we presented "Latin America: A Film Survey." In this course we showed a series of feature and documentary films on Latin America, which students analyzed in class discussions and critical papers. On the basis of this course, we published our first film booklet, *Latin America: A Filmic Approach*, in which we described our course, discussed our concepts of historical film analysis, and presented a series of exemplary student essays.[2]

In our second film course in the spring quarter of 1976, we moved from the study of one geographical area to the cross-cultural comparative treatment of two universal dilemmas. Entitled "The Feature Film as Historical Source: A Study of Human Dilemmas," the course dealt with two major universal themes — (1) economic dislocation and migration and (2) the conflict between law and justice. To provide multiple and often conflicting perspectives on these complex

issues, we screened four films and required students to read two books on each of the two themes. Students then wrote ten-page essays on each of the dilemmas, incorporating ideas from the films and written sources. This course is fully described in our second film booklet, *A Filmic Approach to the Study of Historical Dilemmas*.[3] In this booklet we further refined our film-and-history methodology, besides describing the course structure and again presenting exemplary student essays.

Based on the experience of our first two courses, we decided to focus on one genre — the film as revolutionary weapon — in our third film course offered during the spring quarter of 1977. Since the advent of cinema, filmmakers have used film as a weapon for social change, often revolutionary in nature. The revolutionary use of film rose dramatically in the 1960's, particularly in Third World nations, as some filmmakers became convinced that revolutionary film could help to produce actions that would result in the overthrow of repressive governments and an end to neo-colonial domination.

In this course, we decided to emphasize the revolutionary film genre as it has developed in Latin America. To provide multiple perspectives on the use of film as a revolutionary weapon, we selected films on six Latin American countries — Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, and Peru — because these areas had experienced a broad range of political situations from authoritarian dictatorship to socialist revolution and because of the differences in their socio-economic conditions. Moreover, filmmakers in these countries are among the most active in Latin America and are leaders in the New Latin American Cinema movement.[4] We used films created under a variety of conditions — underground films, government-sponsored films, privately-produced commercial films, and films made in exile. We included documentary and feature films, with both historical and contemporary subjects. Most of the films were features, however, since these provided a greater diversity of goals, revolutionary messages, intended audiences, and filmic styles. Pervading the entire New Latin American Cinema movement, as illustrated by the films we selected, is the dominant theme of history.[5]

In our course we hoped to show students the complexity of studying even one film genre, to develop a valid analytical framework for comparing revolutionary films with different characteristics, and to encourage students to reach their own conclusions concerning the nature and potential effectiveness of revolutionary films. Yet before we could ask students to undertake this challenge, we needed to provide them with a basic background for such film analysis.

In our film courses, we have had to deal with most students' low level of media literacy, which has created problems for them in analyzing films as historical documents. Three basic analytical weaknesses appear in their essays dealing with film as historical source. First, some students suffer from the "synopsis syndrome" — the tendency to summarize film plots rather than analyze the film's message. Second, some fall into the "advocate approach" — the tendency to lavish uncritical praise on a film because it is ideologically in tune with the student's own beliefs. Third, some engage in "nihilistic analysis" — the tendency to reject a film simply because it is ideologically opposed to the student's viewpoint.[6]

In order to contend with this general lack of media literacy and to help students develop some of the basic tools for historical film analysis, we devoted three class periods to a general introduction to this topic. Carlos Cortés first presented a lecture on filmic language, in which he introduced some of the basic terms for describing films — for example, different types of cuts, shots, dissolves, fades, and montage. The students read Roy Huss and Norman Silverstein, *The Film Experience* (New York, 1968) as background. Next Cortés showed his own documentary film, "Northwest from Tumacácori," to illustrate these terms further and pointed out examples of filmic language during the showing. This was the first time we had experimented with ongoing commentary *during* the showing of a film, and student response indicated that this was a particularly effective way of helping them learn filmic terminology. In addition, the problems and possibilities of the historian as filmmaker were discussed. Finally, we showed German director Leni Reifenstahl's dramatic "Triumph of the Will" (Germany, 1934) as an example of the special filmic language of propaganda. Anne Ethridge of the UCR Office of Instructional Media, a specialist in this subject, led the discussion of this topic.

As well as discussing filmic language, we felt the need to provide a brief introduction to the topics of revolutionary cinema and Latin American history. This was particularly crucial to the success of the course, as some of the students had had no previous exposure to the concepts of revolutionary cinema and some had never formally studied Latin America at the university level.

On the subject of Latin America, Leon Campbell lectured on some of the basic aspects of that area, including colonial heritage, social and economic structures, dependency on the developed world, and impact of the impulse toward revolution, including the phenomenon of militarism. To enhance the students' understanding of the twentieth century, several texts were ordered and assigned for background reading: E. Bradford Burns, *Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History*, 2nd. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1977), for its balance and special attention to Brazil; John Gerassi, *The Great Fear in Latin America* (New York, 1966), a radical leftist viewpoint, sharply critical of the United States; Fredrick B. Pike's *Spanish America, 1900-1970: Tradition and Social Innovation* (New York, 1973), which provides a Catholic moderate assessment of Latin America's future; and John Mander's reader, *The Unrevolutionary Society* (New York, 1969), which excerpts passages from readings about several Latin American countries in an effort to demonstrate the power of Latin American conservatism in a changing world. However, our efforts to provide balance were partially thwarted by the unavailability of the Pike and Mander books for use as texts, although copies were placed in the library on reserve.

In the area of revolutionary film, Cortés presented a general overview of the evolution of the social protest film in the United States and the worldwide emergence of revolutionary films. We then focused on Latin American films, adopting a comparative approach. Cortés lectured on the history of the decidedly unrevolutionary Mexican film industry, under which the government stressed commercial, profit-making film production and controlled the distribution of these films. Campbell provided contrast by discussing the neo-colonial development of the Cuban film industry prior to 1959 and its domination by the United

States and Mexican industries. The students were then introduced to changes that had taken place in the Cuban industry since the Cuban Revolution in 1959 as a means of understanding that the New Latin American Cinema movement developed in response to specific national and international situations. Using the Cuban example, students were made aware of many filmmakers' desires to create truly national film industries. Finally, Professor Julianne Burton of the University of California, Santa Cruz, presented an overview lecture on the development of the New Latin American Cinema. With this groundwork laid, we felt that the students were now ready to deal with the basic historical material of the course—Latin American revolutionary films themselves.

We first presented two documentary films—Part One of "Hour of the Furnaces" (Argentina, 1968) and "Mexico: The Frozen Revolution" (Mexico, 1970)—as examples of the use of the documentary style for attempting to challenge existing governmental structures and provoke basic social change. Following the discussion and analysis of these two films, we screened four Latin American feature films—"Memories of Underdevelopment" (Cuba, 1968), "The Principal Enemy" (Peru, 1974), "The Promised Land" (Chile, 1973), and "The Guns" (Brazil, 1963). Although film selection was affected by economics and availability, we were able to screen films that exhibited varieties within the genre, including films which some might feel were not really revolutionary, but rather belonged to the more traditional category of social criticism films.

Prior to the screening of each film, Campbell presented a short lecture which attempted to place the film and filmmaker in their appropriate cultural and historical context. Each film was shown on Thursday afternoon, with discussions held the following Tuesday. During the interim, students were required to write their film analyses, basing them on the lectures, the film, and required readings in the texts. These analyses were due at the beginning of the Tuesday session at which that film was the subject of class discussion. No late papers were accepted. The system of requiring the submission of film analyses prior to class discussion had at least three benefits. First, it produced more individualistic and personal interpretations and avoided the "homogenizing" effect and the inevitable "borrowing" of others' ideas to be found in essays written after class discussions. Second, the writing of analyses helped students develop their thoughts about the film prior to class and led to more widespread, enthusiastic, and thoughtful participation in class discussion. Finally, since students were required to write a minimum of two five-page analyses, we were able to judge their abilities to use film as a historical source and to develop their ideas in a logical and cohesive fashion. Two examples of student essays—one on a documentary and one on a feature film—are included in this publication.

In essays and class discussions, students were asked to consider a number of issues, such as the following. What were the film's messages, goals, intended audiences, and filmic styles? How did these correlate with ideas and perspectives emanating from the readings and lectures? In what historical context was the film made, including the nature of the government at that time? How did the film treat the basic themes dealt with in the lectures and readings, for example, the class system, governmental oppression, imperialism, and the need for social change or revolution? How did the film alter or confirm their conceptions

about Latin America as derived from more traditional sources or prevailing stereotypes (e.g. are the peasants depicted as revolutionary elements)? Did they consider the film to be revolutionary in terms of their own definitions of a revolutionary film? What were some of the strengths and weaknesses of the film in both esthetic and historical terms? What was their estimate of the potential effectiveness of the film as a revolutionary weapon for various audiences based on available information?

In keeping with the course goals, the final examination again dealt with the multiple issues of filmic literacy, the uses of film as historical evidence, and the nature of revolutionary film that had continually been treated throughout the course. First, we asked each student to give his or her individual definition of revolutionary film and to provide a rationale to support that opinion. Based on that definition, our second question asked each student to select which of the six Latin American films screened in the course he or she felt were the most effective and least effective examples of revolutionary weaponry and to provide specific evidence from the films to support those opinions. The third question required students to compare the different filmic treatments of one of three topics — peasant oppression and rebellion, the class system, or imperialism, especially in their particular historical contexts. Finally we asked the students to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of film as a source for the teaching of history and to offer suggestions for future courses employing film as a primary historical source. This final question had a secondary value beyond the evaluation of student performance. It also provided us with insights into the present course and suggestions for planning future film-and-history courses.

The final examination elicited some interesting results. Throughout the course we had carefully avoided presenting students with "the definition" of a revolutionary film. There is certainly no universal agreement on such a definition. Moreover, consistent with our goals of provoking independent student thought and increasing student analytical abilities, we wanted each student's conception of what was or was not a revolutionary film to develop from the course experience. The first final examination question, which asked students to present their definitions and, more important, their rationales for their individual definitions, addressed the results of our pedagogical approach.

Inevitably, due to the inquiry nature of the course, answers reflected an absence of consensus as to what constituted a revolutionary film. However, the answers also demonstrated that students had grappled intellectually with the issue and had come up with solid, well-reasoned, well-argued, often imaginative, if often conflicting, definitions. The most common definition cited for a revolutionary film was one which presented the need for social change, pointed out obstacles to such change, and issued an emotional appeal for action. Others felt that criticizing aspects of society and calling for change were not enough, but rather that revolutionary films must also provide instruction on strategies for bringing about such change. A smaller number of students argued that addressing the issue of change was insufficient for a film to be revolutionary, but rather that such change must be a fundamental, total transformation of a political and social system. A few students contended that such change must involve a class uprising and the overthrow of the elites. Along that line, one

group of students felt that to be truly revolutionary, a film must be comprehensible to the masses—in other words, not so complex, metaphorical, symbolic, and "arty" in filmic language as to impede understanding by the poorly educated or filmicly illiterate viewer.

Finally, there was disagreement over whether intent or results should be a primary criterion for determining whether or not a film was revolutionary. The majority of students felt that goals and intent were the critical determinants—if a filmmaker sought to provoke revolutionary change with a film, this was sufficient to make it revolutionary. A minority of students countered with the argument that the filmmaker's intent was irrelevant and that the only true criterion was results—did the film actually generate revolutionary action ("a film act") by the viewers.

The debate over the nature of revolutionary film carried over into the second question, in which students were asked to present a case for what they felt to be the most effective and least effective revolutionary films. Reflecting the students' independence of thought, an interesting paradox resulted. Each of the six films received at least one "nomination" as most effective and least effective. However, more than half of the class felt that "The Principal Enemy" was the most effective revolutionary film, based on its simple linear structure, clarity of target, explicitness of message, unsubtle presentation of "good" and "evil," and rejection of complex filmic language. Nearly one quarter of the students opted for "Hour of the Furnaces" as most effective, citing its avalanche of "facts," blatant oversimplification of complex issues, and dramatic use of emotion-charged imagery as powerful elements in driving home its revolutionary message.

While there was no clear-cut winner in the least effective category, "The Guns," "Memories of Underdevelopment," and "The Promised Land" drew about equal support. In all three cases students cited the complexity of filmic language, the over-emphasis on often murky symbolism, and the fuzziness of messages as factors in blunting their potential revolutionary impact, particularly with less sophisticated audiences. Beyond this, a number of students argued that "Memories of Underdevelopment" should not even be considered a revolutionary film, but rather a post-revolutionary social criticism film aimed at raising audience awareness and internal reform, not generating revolution.

In the last examination question we asked students to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of film as a source for the teaching of history and what they considered to be the main "do's" and "don't's" that they would suggest for teaching courses using film as the primary historical source. Students were also asked to provide a rationale for the guidelines they suggested.

Every student recognized the advantages that film enjoyed over the written word, namely, its ability to transmit sensory messages to both the eye and the ear, thereby holding students' attention. One student noted that rarely were histories he had read as graphic and poignant as the films shown in the course. Others felt that films allowed the student to act as critic, something generally inhibited by lectures and readings where professors and authors are presumed to possess more and better information than students. Others felt that this freedom to criticize permitted a different, more relaxed form of student-teacher inter-

action and that films allowed viewers to express value judgments about the subjects portrayed on film more readily than those presented in written form. The class was particularly taken with the idea that films could capture the behavior and attitudes of the Latin American masses, who were rarely provided with identities in most histories, since they have seldom left written records. One student felt that because students were conditioned to enjoy films, their use in class allowed teaching "by subterfuge," since students did not resist learning from them as they sometimes do from more traditional sources.

Students generally felt that films should be assigned only after their proper historical context had been presented through readings and lectures. Most wanted information about the filmmaker and his intentions to be made available after class discussion had taken place in order that his ideas might be reconciled with those of the class. Some felt that these views should be made known beforehand, in order that the filmic message not be uncritically accepted as an objective account of the subject under consideration. The students clearly recognized that film's strength—the power and appeal of its message—can also be its weakness, since some students would be inclined to accept these messages as statements of objective reality.

To counteract the persuasive aspects of a series of revolutionary films, students suggested that films of an anti- or counter-revolutionary nature be shown for balance, and others hoped that future courses might deal with one particular country or filmmaker in order to trace historical evolution of style and viewpoint within a particular historical context. Many felt it was crucial to have students understand the complexity of film, filmic language, and historical background in order for a critical analysis of the subject to be undertaken. The instructors were cautioned by some to inform students that revolutionary films often simply raise issues rather than offering definite solutions in the same way that history books frequently do and that answers were no more easily obtained from one historical source than another.

To conclude, we feel that the films acted as excellent vehicles for the study of contemporary Latin America, especially its problems of modernization, continued dependency on the developed world, and claims for the need for revolutionary change to alter the existing situation. The thematic similarity of these revolutionary films led students to understand that the movies reflected more general concerns shared by many persons throughout Latin America and the Third World. The students considered the films to be "living history." By linking films that they found challenging and controversial with the historical process of revolution as it had developed in Mexico and Cuba, students were encouraged to seek out the causes for its failure to occur in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Peru and the reasons for its frustration in Chile. By raising issues about the causes of socio-economic inequities in Latin America and asserting the need for revolution, the films constantly challenged students to re-evaluate their own ideas about the area and the types of change they considered appropriate.

The films themselves served as clear evidence that certain Latin American filmmakers were attempting to create films that would serve as effective tools for both announcing and catalyzing the need for socio-political change.

Students came to realize that the New Latin American Cinema movement included films that constituted weapons of resistance in areas that had failed to experience meaningful change and others that functioned as tools of affirmation and reinforcement in countries that had experienced such socio-political modifications. By describing the process of New Left filmmaking, including "guerrilla" production, the formation of production collectives, the strategies, methods, and ideologies of certain "revolutionary" filmmakers, and filmic efforts both to heighten political awareness and to serve as catalysts for political action, we sought to help students understand that militant cultural manifestations are the outgrowth of a more generalized movement for social change; that, in short, the gun precedes and prepares the way for the camera.[7]

Although this effort at combining film and history is hardly perfect, we feel that quality feature and documentary films, when placed in their appropriate cultural and historical context and when presented as part of a well-conceived pedagogical structure and process, can serve as a valid means of increasing understanding of the past. Through the linking of history and film, students were introduced to the study of history in a dynamic and animated context. As the work of humans, film and history were found to be both fascinating and complex.

FOOTNOTES

1. Riverside *Enterprise*, June 10, 1977, p. A-3.
2. Leon G. Campbell, Carlos E. Cortés, and Robert Pinger, *Latin America: A Filmic Approach* (Riverside: Latin American Studies Program, University of California, 1975).
3. Carlos E. Cortés, Leon G. Campbell, and Alan Curl, *A Filmic Approach to the Study of Historical Dilemmas* (Riverside: Latin American Studies Program, University of California, 1976).
4. For an introductory list of books and articles on this subject see Julianne Burton, *The New Latin American Cinema: An Annotated Bibliography of English-Language Sources, 1960-1976* (New York: Cineaste, 1976).
5. This conclusion was reached by panelists in the session, "The Filmic Approach to Latin America's Past," at the American Historical Association Meeting in Washington, D.C., December 29, 1976. For a synopsis of the session, see the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 57:2 (May, 1977), pp. 399-400.
6. Robert Pinger, "Student Film Analyses," in Campbell, Cortés, and Pinger, *Latin America*, p.12.
7. Julianne Burton, "The Camera as 'Gun': Film and Resistance in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* (forthcoming). The authors are grateful to Professor Burton for making a draft of her paper available in advance of publication.

"HOUR OF THE FURNACES"

By Karrla Burg

"Hour of the Furnaces" is, in my opinion, a highly useful film, although I am not at all sure that it is useful in a constructive sense. The actual usefulness of the film is better evaluated in conjunction with the message that it was intended to convey. The message (or purpose), it seems to me, was to evoke the concept of the economic, social, and political dependence of Latin America as a whole upon the developed nations of the world. I believe that it was intended to stimulate the minds of the various sectors of the population, both within and without Latin America, who might be viewing the film. In direct relationship to this major concept are the results, viz., the disparity of wealth, class distinctions, and the mechanisms by which these are perpetuated, or foreign penetration by imperialistic nations and their relationship to the oligarchy, which in this instance includes not only the upper class but the middle sectors as well.

The film centers on the desperate conditions of the masses and, therefore, it may be at least marginally useful in stimulating the awareness of this group, which composes the masses, as to the implicit contradictions, e.g., the extremes between wealth and poverty, that comprise the problems that they are up against. The filmmakers, Solanas and Getiño, while pointing to the capitalistic nations as the primary source of the problems, seemed to have realized that the people who reside on the outskirts of Latin American civilization would find it tremendously difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend such abstract relationships as exist between the foreign powers and the local oligarchy and then to relate this set of relationships to their own conditions. It also occurs to me that they might not be able to conceptualize a major foreign power distantly removed from the realities of their lives. In order to compensate for this, i.e., the inability of the masses to readily grasp and relate to abstractions, the filmmakers have carefully provided a domestic enemy, viz., the oligarchy, to whom much of the blame for the existing conditions is given. The directors, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getiño, have capitalized on the conspicuous consumption of both the upper class and the middle sectors, especially the latter, and have powerfully dramatized the contrasting, almost primitive, conditions of the lower class.

The conspicuous consumption was exemplified by the flashing of advertisements, mostly for foreign products on which the oligarchy spends most of its surplus and which served to point up the dependency model. In addition, the film depicted aspects of upper and middle class life styles, e.g., wild parties and cattle auctions, which are strictly reserved for the leisure classes, and these examples were then filmicly compared to the poverty and suffering which exists concurrently within the society. At any rate, this would have had some impact on the lower-class viewers (given that this film was partially directed at them), even if they were not able to pick up on the more subtle and sophisticated concepts. By viewing the extremes of living conditions in such close proximity, these people may better comprehend what their condition is in relationship to the other sectors of their society, as they are given, pictorially, something to compare their particular situation to.

However, possibly more significant in terms of arousing awareness were the portions of the film which seem to be directed toward the middle sectors. I saw

this as an attempt to awaken their consciences to the terrible conditions existing outside of their immediate reality and the role that they play in perpetuating these conditions. As far as the middle-sector viewers are concerned, I believe that the appeal was multifaceted in that the film also projected the political suppression via the economic control of the workers, who are generally included within the aspiring middle sectors. Another aspect of appeal to this group was the street violence, which was punctuated by rapid motion scenes together with the jump-cutting technique, both of which were meant to give the impression of instability and to convey feelings of anxiety regarding the political condition. The people *apparently* being brutalized by either military or paramilitary forces were not the local peasantry but rather members of the middle groups of society, people with whom this particular audience could theoretically relate to directly. The economic dependency or neo-colonialism theme was another major appeal to the middle classes. Almost as if the film (if it failed to find its moral target) might arouse this group by indicating the insecurity of their pocketbooks via the foreign powers which control their economic situation.

The major theme then is dependency, and this is not surprising as many leading social scientists subscribe to this model, especially Latin American social scientists such as André Gunder Frank. Those who support the dependency model, vis-a-vis the diffusionist school of thought, hold that the infusion of foreign capital does not solve the social, economic, or political problems of underdevelopment in the Third World areas; rather it is "the development of underdevelopment."[1] Solanas and Getiño are therefore presenting a widely held, widely known paradigm, and the film is not solely the product of some eccentric filmmaker's imagination.

If it is a reasonable assumption that Solanas and Getiño would proceed along the lines proposed by the dependency theorists, then I would take it that the film is particularly directed at the middle sectors of Latin America. This may very well be the vulnerable point at which the complex chain of dependent relationships can be broken and it is from these sectors of the society that change is currently thought to be forthcoming.

To be sure, the techniques used in guerrilla films are designed to manipulate the attitudes of the audience(s) for which it was made. In this particular film the use of newsclips, depicting what appeared to be political suppression, convey the "you are there" sense of reality. These techniques gave me the impression that there is an urgent need for radical change. Even though I was consciously aware, while I was viewing the film, that the scenes had been totally taken out of context and that they may not have in fact been portraying suppression *per se* I still connected these excerpts with the reality that Solanas and Getiño were trying to portray.

The other technique which was utilized was the rapid, almost confused (or confusing) sequences of cuts and crosscuts. While I was aware of specific data, e.g., statistics, being disseminated, I was not left with specific information, but rather I was left with an overall impression of the situation from which to draw

1. André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York, 1969).

my conclusions. I feel that this was the intended result on the part of the filmmakers.

It is difficult to say just how revolutionary a film is, especially in terms of its results. But in terms of intent I believe that the purpose was to evoke revolutionary change or at least to initiate revolutionary thoughts in the minds of the viewers. I support my position via the reference made several times to "Che" Guevara and some of his revolutionary ideology, e.g., the call to arms and the utilization of the radical approach, i.e., the dependency model, after which the filmmakers have patterned this film. Given the nature of the material covered in the film, it is in my estimation much more than social criticism; it is in my mind a revolutionary film.

"THE PROMISED LAND"

by Katherine Cech

The film, "The Promised Land," was produced by Chile's national film institute, Chile Films, during the Allende regime, 1970-1973. Although the film chronicles the life and death of the people in a small Chilean village, it is not directed to this class of people. Instead, the complex nature of the filmic techniques and dialogue and the symbolic use of characters and places suggest that the film was intended for a literate and well-educated audience. The fact that it was filmed under the sanction of the existing government indicates that the film's purpose was not to instigate a revolution but rather to perpetuate the existing revolutionary political ideology. President Salvador Allende's most strident opposition was the middle class in collusion with the oligarchical elite. For this reason it seems altogether possible that director Miguel Littín, working under the auspices of the government, produced a film that was intended to explain and praise the socialist doctrine to the opposition. Not only would it make Allende's socialist ideology understandable, but the film would also portray the life of the peasant in such a way as to create sympathy in the middle class audience. Thus the film's purpose seems to have been to familiarize non-peasant audiences with the true situation of the peasant and in so doing appeal to the audience's sense of humanity so they might understand the need for Allende's socialist actions.

Miguel Littín takes an unusual vantage point in his attempt to endear the peasant to the middle class audience. Instead of distorting or simplifying the peasant character (so as to make it totally sympathetic), he has chosen to depict not only their admirable qualities but also their weaknesses, idiosyncracies and ignorance. I believe that although the simplifying tactic (as was used in "The Principal Enemy" can be successful, to an intelligent audience it defeats its purpose. This is to say that an educated audience readily sees the fallacy in simplification or distortion and rejects such techniques as propaganda. Miguel Littín was wise, then, to portray the peasant as a total human being so that his middle and upper class audience is almost forced to accept the portrayal as valid. And although this total portrayal was undoubtedly more difficult to execute, I believe the end result is entirely successful.

Combining Littín's intent with his depiction of the peasant, his thesis statement becomes clear. He wants the viewer to like the peasant; he wants the viewer to leave the theater in complete empathy with him. But most of all he wants the audience to appreciate the government's actions to alleviate the suffering of peasants. He wants to say that peasants are people with all the cares and desires that the audience has. They can be humerous and poignant, sly or tender; they are human beings like the audience themselves and they deserve better than they have been getting.

"The Promised Land" abounds in filmic technique, complex dialogue, and symbolic allusions. Many of those employed by Littín are well worth

discussing because of their contribution to the film as a whole. Littín used, of course, traditional filming methods and with expertise. Also techniques such as the cross-cut, the zoom shot, the jump-cut, and the inter-cut were used with success. The zoom shot, for instance, was used to accentuate emotions. For example, when the peasant leader, José Durán, asks his companion, Pin-Stripe, "How do we get started?" Pin-Stripe replies, "Well, you can start with this," and gave José a slim, white book. The camera zooms in on José's face, stressing his confused and bewildered expression. Later when the town of Palmilla is established there is a celebration scene with everyone laughing and drinking. Darkness seems to enfold the place as the camera zooms in on José's troubled face. Then it zooms in on the faces of a dancing couple. Lighting was used in this scene to emphasize the emotions on the faces and to de-emphasize the merriment in the background. The faces—tired, care-worn, weary faces—among the merriment make a strong contrast between the merry occasion and the weariness felt by the people. It seems that even supposedly happy times are tainted by worry and sadness for the peasant.

The cross-cut was used most advantageously during the end of the film when the whole village is being massacred by government troops. By showing a particularly bloody, heart-wrenching scene inter-cut three times by other bloody scenes, the effect of the massacre is intensified. One other place where the cross-cut is particularly useful occurs at the death of the "old woman," the woman that José and his lover Meche had saved at the train. The scene shows the dead woman being carried off to burial. Then there is a cut to a couple making love in the forest and then back to the woman's burial. This juxtaposition of death and rebirth makes a strong message of hope and stresses the sense of continuity within the peasant community.

To signify passage of time, Littín employed a variety of techniques besides the traditional night-scene-cut-to-day-scene technique. One particularly remarkable transition appears at the beginning, when the first homeless peasants trod north to find farmland. The quick sequence of shots moves from a group of peasants walking, to a few peasants inviting some folks to join them, and back to a larger group walking down a different road. This occurs several times in succession, each time increasing the travelling group. In this fashion a sizable portion of time is indicated as passing. When the group reaches the site of Palmilla, a setting sun welcomes them. A quick fade-out, fade-in to a fire and a pan of villagers clearing the land indicates another passage of time. Then a cut to an established village with the villagers working their crops marks yet another passage of time.

Usually the camera was placed at eye level, but there are exceptions. For instance, when, at the end of the film, José is caught by the government soldiers, roped, and huddled on the ground, the camera is used subjectively from the eyes of the soldiers. I believe this technique is far more powerful in this scene than would be a straight, objective shot. Had the cameras been placed objectively, the scene would have lost its immediate sense of involvement. José's torture would have been less agonizing seen in such a detached way. But by making the viewer

see José as the soldiers do, it implicates the viewer in the action, makes him guilty, and forces him to really see what José feels.

Repeating a particular scene viewed from different angles is another successful technique employed by Littín. This technique was used at the end of the movie during the massacre of the villagers of Palmilla. Littín must have used three cameras to record a scene from three different vantage points. The effect is especially powerful in the scene when a group of children run, frightened by the soldiers. The camera records the movement from the back, sees the children shot, and follows their falls to the ground. Immediately the scene is repeated, this time in profile, giving some indication of the children's expressions. Finally the scene is replayed in a frontal view, giving full exposure to the children's tortured, anguished faces, their bloody, writhing bodies, and their shrill, pain-filled cries. The effect is, to say the least, horrifying.

Music is employed by Littín as a supplementary tool to further explain the story. Usually in a ballad-like song the events of the story are recounted, although one exception is the "Marseillaise" played while socialist leaflets drop from a red plane. The connection is obvious: "Allons enfants de la patrie / le jour de gloire est arrivé!" The "Marseillaise" gives glorious implications to the socialist revolution. It is at the same time humorous to those who remember that the Marmaduke Grove regime lasted only two weeks.

"The Promised Land" is rich with images and symbolism. What begins as a seemingly realistic (almost documentary) film emerges into a bizarre sort of surrealism. As in surrealism, images often become real characters. The first image which appears as a real character is the Virgin Mary, entering early in the film. The narrator (then a boy) sees the Virgin on a hill and approaches her spellbound. She appears as a real character several more times in the film and becomes an important impetus for José. Another image brought to life is that of death. As José Durán flees from the town of Huique, "death rides with him." Littín actually has men with skull-like faces riding on horseback, following José back to the village.

Symbolism also plays an important part in the film. A humorous instance occurs when the red plane swoops down on Palmilla bringing news of the socialist revolution. The red plane obviously refers to red as in communism, while Marmaduke Grove's appearance from the sky takes on the importance of a savior saint to the peasants. His appearance symbolizes, of course, the advent of the new regime. Two more symbolic scenes are particularly interesting. Both occur at the end of the film during the murder of Palmilla villagers. First, after José is killed, he reappears and gives his rifle to the narrator boy. Marmaduke Grove appears and gives the boy his sword. Naturally the sword is the sword of socialism, while the rifle is the rifle of revolt. The final scene of masses of peasants swooping down from the hill above Palmilla symbolizes the continual strength of the peasants and their desire for revenge.

Religious symbolism has a dual role in "The Promised Land" in both negative and positive statements. Obviously, when the nuns slam the windows closed on the train to keep the peasants out, Littín is making a pejorative statement about religion. But the religion being criticized is that which is connected with the state: the train being stopped is the corrupt government being halted; the nuns inside are the church that is part of the ruling oligarchy.

Contrariwise, the Virgin Mary's appearances are portrayed in a positive light. It is she who spurs José on his quest and who aids him in it. And although the viewer knows it is a futile, if not comical, quest, the Virgin Mary is the patron saint; she cares. It is she who walks among the dead of Palmilla, nude, stripped of all that makes her a tool of the Church; she is bare to her real essence. She cries. Thus Littín wants to criticize the connection between Church and state, but he does not want to belittle religion itself.

I believe that Miguel Littín has been successful in conveying his thesis, but I am not sure that the Chilean middle class would be convinced that the Allende regime was justified because of the film. I think that although viewers might come away from the film with new understanding, they would not necessarily be willing to then give up some of their lands or wages to the peasants nor would they cease in their opposition to Allende. In this respect the film fails. It must be added that the film was not ready for release until 1974, and Allende was killed in 1973. For this reason the film's power was never really tested. It would be interesting to have seen what influence the film would have had on the middle class in view of the fact that they supported the overthrow of Allende.

Filmic technique was largely successful, although I must admit that I had trouble separating characters. I think that this is probably due to the fact that I am non-Spanish speaking and was forced to strain at the subtitles to the extent that I did not always make the necessary connection between faces and names. I was impressed, however, with the English translations into subtitles because they were translated into American slang comparable to that being used by the peasants.

I would like to make a final comment about the portrayal of the peasant. A criticism might be raised that Littín's peasant is not only portrayed in humorous light, but that he is also ridiculed. I do not feel this to be true. Certainly José Durán represents a sort of Don Quixote with an "impossible dream," and it is laughable when he rushes off to save Huique. But just as Don Quixote is lovable, so is José Durán. And Littín never lets the viewer forget the seriousness of José's quixotic quest. Thus the message received by the audience is intensified. The juxtaposition of the futile nature of Jose's quest and the very serious need of it only intensifies the hopelessness that was meant to be conveyed.